

**Appropriations Committee
Health Subcommittee
February 24, 2022**

**Public Hearing on:
House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
(Department of Developmental Services)**

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the state budget.

My name is Jessica Chubbuck and I am employed with Kuhn Employment Opportunities in Meriden as a Program Specialist. Kuhn provides day and employment services for the Department of Developmental Services. I have been with the company for nearly 5 years. I found Kuhn while working with a temp agency. The hours were perfect for my schedule, as I am a single mom with one son who attends public school Monday-Friday. I started off working as job coach and when the opportunity became available, I applied for a Program Specialist position. I am currently working a minimum of 35 hours per week and I make \$18.00 hourly. I am responsible for a case load of 39 individuals who have a range of developmental disabilities. A regular day for me is filled with incoming phone calls, emails and text messages from group home managers, family members, DDS Case Managers and my clients before I even start my day. Followed by scheduled and unscheduled meetings with my individual's teams and colleagues. Because of the recent staffing issues, in addition to our regular duties, Program Specialists at our company are asked to assist with program coverage, on a daily basis. When I leave for the day, my job is not done. I take phone calls and respond to emails, outside of my regular work hours, because you never know if you're going to have time to connect with people the next day. I love my job and the level of responsibility I have within this company. I assist on our committees and any/all extra activities for our individuals. I feel that I go above and beyond for our company, because I truly love this field and being able to see our individuals grow to be the best people they can be.

Unfortunately the \$18.00 just isn't cutting it anymore. There have been weeks where I have had to choose between paying my electric bill or getting groceries to put food on the table for my son. There have been weeks where I have had to borrow money from friends in order to put gas in my car to even get to work. I work for a state funded company, yet I don't qualify for state assistance. I am sure I am not the only person in this boat. Being a single parent, I am unable to work a second shift job anywhere else because I have my son fulltime, and do not have family in the state of CT who are available to help out with my son. There are other companies paying WELL over \$18.00 an hour for much less responsibility. Participants in our programs require our full attention at all times. All of our Direct Support Staff are required to learn and memorize all protocols and guidelines for the clients we serve here at Kuhn. Each staff person is also required to be up to date on all of their trainings and hold a public service license for driving.

Some participants have very strict dining guidelines, some require toileting, and some require medications that we need to pass while they are here in program. Ensuring that our staff are fully trained is one thing, but staff being able to build and form trusting relationships with our clients is the most important part of working in this field. We become family to our participants. We see them every single day, sometimes more than they even get to see their own families. It becomes stressful for our participants when staff come and go.

I have debated many times applying for bartending or waitressing positions, where employees will tell me “you will make more money here”. But truthfully, I love my job and I want to be here to work with my individuals and their families. Direct Support staff, earning \$16.50/hour and are leaving left and right to work for other businesses who pay more. No one wants to work for \$16.50 an hour, when milk costs \$4.00 a gallon! Direct Support staff are responsible for people’s lives for \$16.50/hour. The rate of pay for non-profit state funded agencies, like Kuhn, NEEDS to change!! We need to pay staff accordingly.

Nonprofit Providers, like Kuhn, funded by the Department of Developmental Services are grateful for the efforts of the Appropriations Committee and Governor Lamont to address wage and funding issues specific to services for the Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities population, however more is needed. I’m here tonight to ask you to honor the long term plan to address underfunding of community nonprofits and increase funding this year by an additional \$461 million, or 8% in total for FY23. Thank you for your time.